

# **Volume I District Elements**

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**



## Planning an Inclusive City <sup>100</sup>

**W**ASHINGTON, D.C. IS ONE OF THE GREAT CITIES OF THE WORLD. IT IS THE nation's capital, a global center of knowledge and power, and the central city of one of America's largest and most prosperous metropolitan areas. It is also our home—a city of great neighborhoods, a vibrant downtown, historic buildings, diverse shopping, renowned institutions, and magnificent parks and natural areas. <sup>100.1</sup>

Our city bears the imprints of many past plans, each a reflection of the goals and visions of its era. The influence of these plans can be seen all around us—they affect the way we live and work, the way we travel, and the design of our communities. Planning is part of our heritage. It has shaped the District's identity for more than two centuries and has made us the place we are today. <sup>100.2</sup>

The fact that we are a mature city does not mean it is time to stop planning and just let the future happen. In fact, the need for planning has never been greater than it is today. <sup>100.3</sup>

The District is changing. At this moment, more housing is under construction in the District of Columbia than was built during the entire decade of the 1990s. Enough office space to replicate downtown Denver is on the drawing boards. Federal properties—some larger in land area than all of Georgetown or Anacostia—are being studied for new uses. These changes generate excitement and tension at the same time. Issues of race, class, and equity rise to the surface as the city grows. We strive to be a more “inclusive” city—to ensure that economic opportunities reach all of our residents, and to protect and conserve the things we value most about our communities. <sup>100.4</sup>

As we think about our future, other issues arise. How will people get around the city in 20 years? Where will our children go to school? Will police and fire services be adequate? Will our rivers be clean? Will our air be healthy? How will we resolve the affordable housing crisis and ensure that housing choices are available for all residents? How can we ensure that District residents have access to the thousands of new jobs we are expecting? How will the character of our neighborhoods be conserved and improved? How will federal and local interests be balanced? <sup>100.5</sup>

This Comprehensive Plan provides our response to these important questions and a framework to achieve our goals. <sup>100.6</sup>

The Comprehensive Plan includes detailed maps and policies for the physical development of the District of Columbia. The Plan also addresses social and economic issues that affect and are linked to the development of the city and

**“Growing inclusively means that individuals and families are not confined to particular economic and geographic boundaries but are able to make important choices—choices about where they live, how and where they earn a living, how they get around the city, and where their children go to school. Growing inclusively also means that every resident can make these choices—regardless of whether they have lived here for generations or moved here last week, and regardless of their race, income, or age.”**

— A VISION FOR GROWING AN INCLUSIVE CITY, 2004

## Planning in the District—Then And Now

Washington, D.C. is widely known as a city steeped in American history. This reputation extends to city planning too, and starts with the very origin of the District of Columbia in 1791. <sup>100.7</sup>

More than two centuries ago, George Washington commissioned Pierre L'Enfant to plan a new national capital on the banks of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers. L'Enfant and surveyor Benjamin Banneker designed Washington's unique diagonal and grid system and sited some of America's most important landmarks, including the U.S. Capitol and the White House. <sup>100.8</sup>

A century later, the US Congress asked the McMillan Commission to transform Washington into a world-class capital city. The Commission responded with a grand plan to beautify the District with the National Mall, many neighborhood parks, and an expanded Rock Creek Park. <sup>100.9</sup>

Today, the L'Enfant and McMillan Plans are regarded as major milestones in Washington's history. The plans of the mid- to late- 20<sup>th</sup> century are less celebrated, but are no less important. In 1924, federal legislation created the National Capital Park and Planning Commission. Its initial focus was on city parks and playgrounds but soon expanded to include land use, transportation, and public facilities. The Commission produced a Comprehensive Plan in 1950, another in 1961, and another in 1967. These plans proposed radical changes to the city's landscape, including freeways and "urban

renewal." The mid-century Comprehensive Plans were largely driven by federal interests and a desire to retain the beauty and functionality of Washington as a capital city. <sup>100.10</sup>

In 1973, the federal Home Rule Act designated the Mayor of the District of Columbia as the city's principal planner. The Comprehensive Plan was divided into "District" Elements to be prepared by the District's Office of Planning, and "Federal" Elements to be prepared by the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC). The first Comprehensive Plan of the post-Home Rule era, containing both District and Federal Elements, was completed in 1984. <sup>100.11</sup>

Between 1984 and 2005, the District Elements were amended four times. A 1985 amendment added the Land Use Element and

Maps. The 1989 and 1994 amendments added Ward Plans to the document, roughly tripling its size. The 1998 amendments included a variety of map and text changes to reflect then-current conditions. A new version of the Federal Elements, meanwhile, was prepared by NCPC in the early 2000s and approved in 2004. <sup>100.12</sup>

During the past six years, the District has moved into a new era of urban planning, headlined by neighborhood plans, corridor studies, the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative, and the citywide "Vision for Growing an Inclusive City." The Vision is emblematic of a new philosophy about planning in the city, which has been carried forward into this Comprehensive Plan. The plan's overriding emphasis is on improving the quality of life for current and future residents of the District of Columbia. <sup>100.13</sup>



*The 1791 L'Enfant Plan*

our citizens. It allows the community to predict and understand the course of future public actions and shape private sector investment and actions too. It allows the District to ensure that its resources are used wisely and efficiently and that public investment is focused in the areas where it is needed most. <sup>100.14</sup>

The Comprehensive Plan provides guidance on the choices necessary to make the District a better city. No single person or organization is in a position to make these decisions alone. Many residents, governmental agencies, businesses, institutions, and leaders have helped shape this plan. Their continued commitment will be needed to carry it out in the coming years. <sup>100.15</sup>

## The Comprehensive Plan's Legal Basis, Role and Content <sup>101</sup>

### Legislative Foundation <sup>102</sup>

The DC Code vests the Mayor with the authority to initiate, develop and submit a Comprehensive Plan to the DC Council, as well as the power to propose amendments following the plan's adoption. In the course of adoption, the DC Council may alter the Comprehensive Plan, subject to the approval of the Mayor and review by the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPD) and Congress. <sup>102.1</sup>

Because of the District's role as the nation's capital, the Comprehensive Plan includes two components: the Federal Elements, which address federal lands and facilities, and the District Elements, which address all other lands. Together, these elements constitute the District's mandated planning documents. <sup>102.2</sup>

Section 1-301.62 of the DC Code states that:

(t)he purposes of the District Elements of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital are to:

- a. Define the requirements and aspirations of District residents, and accordingly influence social, economic and physical development;
- b. Guide executive and legislative decisions on matters affecting the District and its citizens;
- c. Promote economic growth and jobs for District residents;
- d. Guide private and public development in order to achieve District and community goals;

### A Revised Plan is Needed

From 1985 to 2005, a Comprehensive Plan drafted in the early 1980s governed land use decisions in the District. By the early 2000s, it was becoming clear that the Comp Plan was out of date. The "future"—as envisioned by the Plan—was already history. <sup>102.3</sup>

In 2003, a Citizens' Task Force, appointed by the Mayor and DC Council, completed an assessment of the existing Plan. As a result of the assessment, the Office of Planning recommended that the Comprehensive Plan be thoroughly revised, not just amended. The Task Force concluded that the plan was outdated, difficult to read and understand, lacked maps and graphics, and did not provide the direction needed to address the tough issues facing our city today. <sup>102.4</sup>

Based on this assessment, the Mayor and Council agreed to move ahead with a major revision of the Comprehensive Plan, rather than starting another round of piecemeal amendments. It was time for an in-depth analysis of existing conditions and trends, and a fresh look at the city's future. It was also time to reach out to thousands of DC residents to raise awareness of why the Comprehensive Plan is important to the city's future and to the daily life of residents and businesses. The 2006 Comprehensive Plan is the response to that call. <sup>102.5</sup>

**The Comprehensive Plan is not intended to be a substitute for more detailed plans nor dictate precisely what other plans must cover. Rather it is the one document that bridges all topics and is crosscutting in its focus. It alone is the Plan that looks at the “big picture” of how change will be managed in the years ahead.**

- e. Maintain and enhance the natural and architectural assets of the District; and
- f. Assist in the conservation, stabilization, and improvement of each neighborhood and community in the District. <sup>102.6</sup>

The DC Code broadly defines the plan’s scope. Section 1-204.23 states that the Comprehensive Plan “may include land use elements, urban renewal and redevelopment elements, a multi-year program of municipal public works for the District, and physical, social, economic, transportation, and population elements.” <sup>102.7</sup>

The Code also specifies that the land use element include “a generalized land use map or a series of maps representing the land use policies set forth in the Land Use Element.” <sup>102.8</sup>

## The Family of Plans <sup>103</sup>

The Comprehensive Plan can be thought of as the centerpiece of a “Family of Plans” that guide public policy in the District (See Figure 1.1). In the past, there has been a lack of clarity over the relationship between the Comprehensive Plan and the many other plans prepared by District agencies. This has reduced the Plan’s effectiveness and even resulted in internal inconsistencies between agency plans. <sup>103.1</sup>

Under the DC Code, the Comprehensive Plan is the one plan that guides the District’s development, both broadly and in detail. Thus it carries special importance in that it provides overall direction and shapes all other physical plans that District government adopts. In fact, all plans relating to the city’s physical development should take their lead from the Comprehensive Plan, building on common goals and shared assumptions about the future. For example, the growth projections contained in the Comprehensive Plan should be incorporated by reference in other plans that rely on such forecasts. <sup>103.2</sup>

As the guide for all District planning, the Comprehensive Plan establishes the priorities and key actions that other plans address in greater detail. The broad direction it provides may be implemented through agency strategic plans, operational plans, long-range plans on specific topics (such as parks or housing), and focused plans for small areas of the city. <sup>103.3</sup>

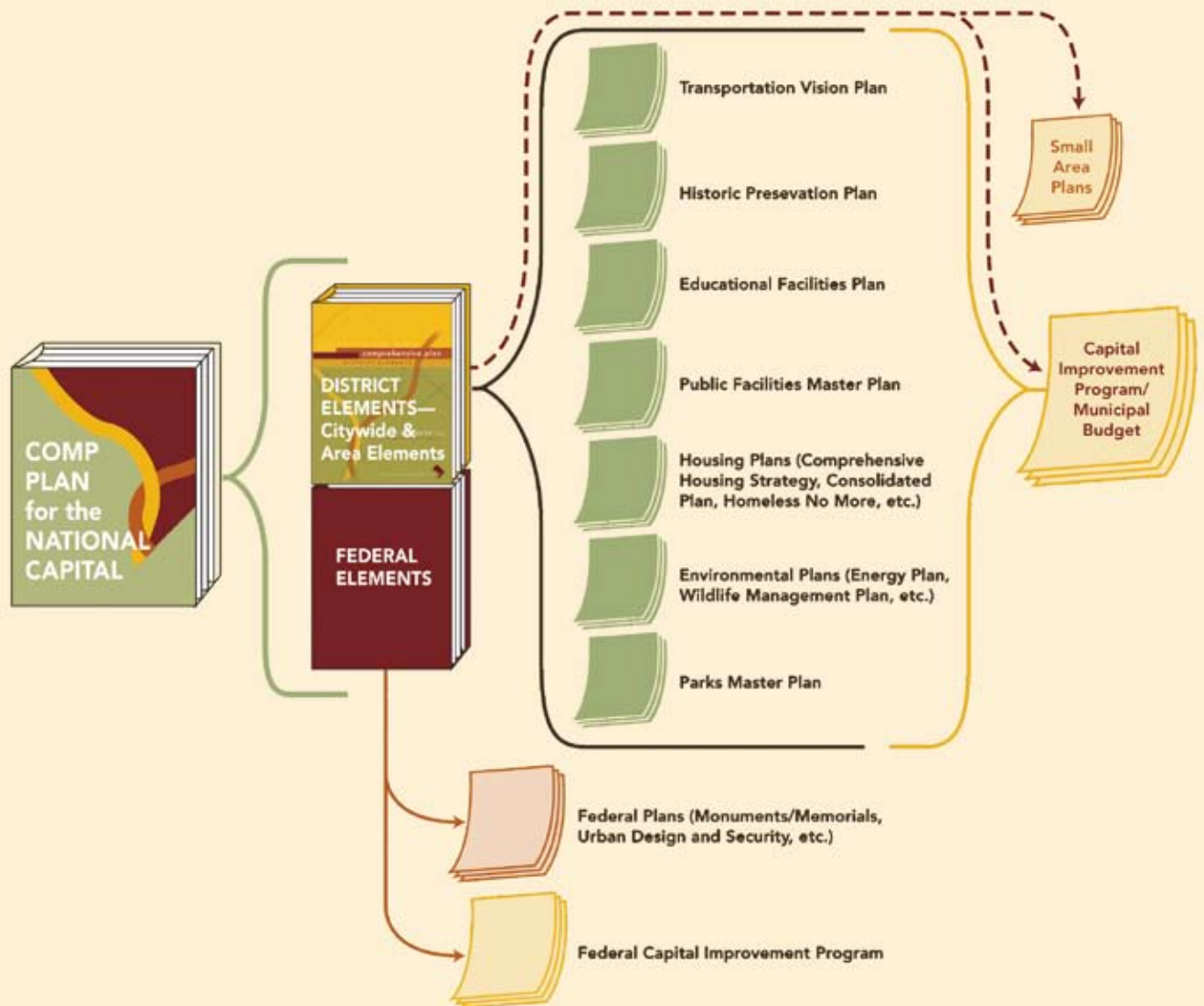
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Figure 1.1:

# The Family of Plans

103.4



**The Comprehensive Plan includes 10 Area Elements, which together encompass the entire District. Area Elements focus on issues unique to that part of the city.**

crosscutting in its focus. It alone is the Plan that looks at the “big picture” of how change will be managed in the years ahead. <sup>103.5</sup>

Where appropriate, this Comprehensive Plan includes cross-references and text boxes to highlight other documents in the “Family of Plans.” Some examples include the federally-mandated State Transportation Plan (known as the “Transportation Vision Plan”), the Historic Preservation Plan, the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and the Public Facilities Plan. Other agency plans may be guided by Comprehensive Plan policies but are outside of the city government’s direct control. These include the District of Columbia Public Schools Master Facilities Plan. <sup>103.6</sup>

## The Three “Tiers” of Planning <sup>104</sup>

Since the late 1980s, the District has maintained a three-tiered system of city planning comprised of:

- a. Citywide policies
- b. Ward-level policies
- c. Small area policies. <sup>104.1</sup>

In the past, the Comprehensive Plan has been the repository for the citywide and ward-level policies. The small area policies, meanwhile, have appeared in separately bound “Small Area Plans” for particular neighborhoods and business districts. As specified in the city’s municipal code, Small Area Plans provide supplemental guidance to the Comprehensive Plan and are not part of the legislatively adopted document. <sup>104.2</sup>

The 2006 Comprehensive Plan retains three geographic tiers but incorporates a number of changes to improve the plan’s effectiveness and readability. Probably the most important change is the replacement of “Ward Plans” with “Area Elements.” While Ward Plans were an effective way to express local priorities within the Comp Plan, the boundaries changed dramatically in 1990 and 2000 due to population shifts. Redistricting will occur again after the Censuses in 2010, 2020, and so on. Moreover, the city’s wards are drawn to ensure an equal number of residents in each Council district rather than to provide a coherent rationale for planning the city. Thus, places like Downtown Washington (divided by a ward boundary) and the Anacostia River (divided by four ward boundaries) have been covered in multiple places in past Comprehensive Plans. This has resulted in redundancy and fragmented policies for many of Washington’s most important places. The relationship between the Comprehensive Plan and the three tiers is described below. <sup>104.3</sup>



***Tier One: The Citywide Elements***

The Comprehensive Plan includes 13 Citywide Elements, each addressing a topic that is citywide in scope, followed by an Implementation Element. The elements are listed below:

- Framework (setting the plan's guiding principles and vision)
- Land Use
- Transportation
- Housing
- Economic Development
- Parks, Recreation, and Open Space
- Educational Facilities
- Environmental Protection
- Infrastructure
- Urban Design
- Historic Preservation
- Community Services and Facilities
- Arts and Culture
- Implementation. <sup>104.4</sup>

***Tier Two: The Area Elements***

The Comprehensive Plan includes 10 Area Elements, shown on Map 1.1. Taken together, these ten areas encompass the entire District of Columbia. The Area Elements are listed alphabetically below:

- Capitol Hill
- Central Washington
- Far Northeast and Southeast
- Far Southeast and Southwest
- Lower Anacostia Waterfront and Near Southwest
- Mid-City
- Near Northwest
- Rock Creek East
- Rock Creek West
- Upper Northeast. <sup>104.5</sup>

Although the Citywide and Area Elements are in separate sections of this document, they carry the same legal authority. The Area Elements focus on issues that are unique to particular parts of the District. Many of their policies are “place-based,” referencing specific neighborhoods, corridors, business districts, and local landmarks. However, the policies are still general in nature and do not prescribe specific uses or design details. Nor do the Area Elements repeat policies that already appear in the citywide elements. They are intended to provide a sense of local priorities and to recognize the different dynamics at work in each part of the city. <sup>104.6</sup>

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Map 1.1:

Area Elements Map <sup>104.7</sup>



\*\*\* Government of the  
District of Columbia  
Anthony A. Williams, Mayor  
Office of Planning ~ December 2006

### ***Tier Three: The Small Area Plans***

As noted above, Small Area Plans are not part of the Comprehensive Plan. As specified in the DC Code, Small Area Plans supplement the Comprehensive Plan by providing detailed direction for areas ranging in size from a few city blocks to entire neighborhoods or corridors. In the past, Small Area Plans have been prepared for places in the city where District action was necessary to manage growth, promote revitalization, or achieve other long-range planning goals. Examples include the H Street NE corridor, the Takoma Metro station area, and the Shaw/Convention Center area. Small Area Plans are adopted by the DC Council by resolution. The Comprehensive Plan is adopted in a different manner—by legislation—and becomes part of the DC Municipal Regulations. <sup>104.8</sup>

In the future, additional Small Area Plans will be developed. The Implementation Element of this Comprehensive Plan outlines where and under what conditions such plans should be undertaken. Existing Small Area Plans are cross-referenced in the Comprehensive Plan Area Elements and should be consulted for further detail about the areas they cover. <sup>104.9</sup>

## **Moving from Plan to Action** <sup>105</sup>

This Comprehensive Plan also includes a chapter on plan implementation. The Implementation Element describes how the plan's recommended actions are to be carried out and by which government agencies. Timeframes for implementation are also provided so that the plan's implementation steps can be measured and monitored. The addition of this element is a major departure from past Comprehensive Plans for the District. It represents an important step forward in assuring accountability. <sup>105.1</sup>

Of course, an implementation element alone is no guarantee that the policies of this Comprehensive Plan will be followed or that its actions will be carried out. It is the job of the District administration to abide by the Comprehensive Plan and coordinate with other agencies of government to ensure that future actions respect its policies. The most important tools for doing this are zoning and coordination of capital improvement programming with the policies and actions set forth in the Comprehensive Plan. The use of these tools to carry out the Comprehensive Plan is described in the Implementation Element. <sup>105.2</sup>

**The Implementation Element identifies priority actions—the actions that must and should be completed in the near term. The addition of this element is a major departure from past Comprehensive Plans for the District. It represents an important step forward in assuring accountability.**

## Comprehensive Plan Technical Appendices <sup>106</sup>

Developing policies for the District’s future requires an extensive and detailed “baseline” of information about existing conditions and planning issues. It would be impossible to include all of that information within this document and still maintain its readability. Thus, a series of technical appendices has been assembled to supplement the Comprehensive Plan. These appendices include additional narrative text, data, and maps on transportation, infrastructure, the environment, and economic development in the city. The Technical Appendices should be consulted for further guidance and details on the topics covered in this Comprehensive Plan. <sup>106.1</sup>

## How This Plan Was Prepared <sup>107</sup>

This Comprehensive Plan is the outcome of a four-year revision process. <sup>107.1</sup>

In 2002, the Mayor and Council deferred the regularly-scheduled amendment of the District Elements and instead asked the Office of Planning to conduct a Comprehensive Plan assessment. A 29-member citizens task force was convened to advise the District as it evaluated changes that would improve the Comp Plan’s effectiveness, organization, and format. The Comprehensive Plan Assessment Report, issued in February 2003, recommended a major Plan revision and fundamental changes to the document’s structure. The report also suggested that the first step in the revision should be to develop a broad vision for the city’s future. <sup>107.2</sup>

A “Vision for Growing an Inclusive City” was developed in response. The Vision included an appraisal of the District’s major planning issues and articulated goals for addressing these issues in the future. Its content was shaped by position papers on topics ranging from education to housing, workshops with department heads and civic leaders, and input from more than 3,000 District residents at the Mayor’s Citizens Summit in November 2003. The Vision was endorsed by the Council in June 2004. <sup>107.3</sup>

Work on the Comprehensive Plan revision began in Fall 2004. With the Vision’s directive to “grow an inclusive city,” the revision was designed to be an “inclusive” process. The goal of this process was not merely to involve the public in creating the Plan—it was to build a constituency for the Plan to advocate for more effective implementation in the future. Thus, education and outreach about the Plan became as important as public input. <sup>107.4</sup>

This is the District’s first Comprehensive Plan prepared during the “digital” era and as such, a host of new tools were used to reach the community. The project website [www.inclusivecity.org](http://www.inclusivecity.org) was used to publicize meetings, display information, provide drafts for comment, and receive feedback through bulletin boards and e-mail. The website received more than 1.3 million “hits”



*Community workshops were essential to the Plan revision. Three “rounds” of workshops were held, each comprised of four to eight interactive meetings or gatherings.*

over the course of the project. Television and radio were also used, drawing residents to town meetings, workshops, and public hearings. <sup>107.5</sup>

The Comprehensive Plan's content was also shaped by a Plan Revision Task Force. The 28-member Task Force represented diverse interests and geographic areas, and advised the Office of Planning on the Comprehensive Plan's content as well as its maps and place-specific recommendations. Similarly, an Interagency Working Group representing more than 20 District and federal agencies was convened throughout the process to provide policy feedback and technical assistance. Small Group Discussions, attended by stakeholders and others with a particular interest in plan topics, were convened on specific issues such as higher education and environmental quality. <sup>107.6</sup>

Large community workshops were also essential to the Plan revision. Three "rounds" of workshops were held, each comprised of four to eight interactive meetings or gatherings. In all, the workshops drew more than 1,500 participants, with virtually every neighborhood of the city taking part. The workshops were supplemented by dozens of meetings with Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, Citizen and Civic Associations, interest groups, and individuals. <sup>107.7</sup>

While public involvement was the "driver" behind the Plan's content, its policies and actions have also been shaped by many other sources. Foremost among these is the prior Comprehensive Plan; many of its policies have been edited and carried forward. Similarly, recent plans and planning efforts, including the newly updated Federal Elements, also guide the Comprehensive Plan's content. Finally, an enormous amount of data collection and analysis underpins the Plan's recommendations. This data was largely absent from the prior plan, leading to findings and recommendations that were not always supported by fact. <sup>107.8</sup>

This Comprehensive Plan was presented to the DC Council in the summer of 2006, with Council public hearings held in the fall. Revisions to the draft plan were made based on Council comments and public testimony, and the document was adopted in December, 2006. <sup>107.9</sup>

This Comprehensive Plan has been written to be an effective resource for those who seek general information on how the District may change over the next 20 years, as well as those who want or need to understand how the city plans to respond to particular issues and problems.

# How to Use the Comprehensive Plan 108

This document has been designed for use by elected officials, District government, residents, businesses and developers, and others with an interest in the future of the District of Columbia. The fact that so many different users will consult the Comprehensive Plan shapes the way information is presented. Although it is a legal document, the Comprehensive Plan has been written in “plain English” to make it more accessible. Key issues are described with data to make the purpose of policies more apparent. Graphics, maps, photos, and charts have been used to illustrate major points and improve the legibility of the text. Text boxes are used to present background information. The Comprehensive Plan is organized to eliminate the duplication of policies and actions that made the previous plan difficult to use. Cross-references are used to direct the reader to other relevant and related policies and actions within the document. 108.1

This Comprehensive Plan has been written to be an effective resource for those who seek general information on how the District may change over the next 20 years, as well as those who want or need to understand how the city plans to respond to particular issues and problems. As the District’s primary planning document, the Comprehensive Plan is of particular interest to elected officials (who must adopt it and fund its implementation) as well as agency heads who must bring other plans in line with it. 108.2

The Comprehensive Plan’s Generalized Policy Map and Future Land Use Map are incorporated as part of the document and provide the foundation for land use decision-making and zoning. Both maps are described in detail in the Framework Element. These maps appear as poster-sized foldouts. They are supplemented by numerous smaller maps that appear throughout the text. 108.3

At the heart of the Comprehensive Plan are a series of goal, policy, and action statements:

- **Goals** describe ideal future conditions for a particular topic such as housing or transportation. Following the Framework Element, each of the citywide elements begins with a single goal statement.
- **Policies** provide guidance to the District as it makes decisions relating to each goal. This document contains hundreds of policies, each preceded by a title that indicates the subject being addressed.
- **Actions** identify the specific steps to be taken by the District to implement the policies. These are prioritized and assigned to District agencies in the Implementation Element. 108.4



The policies and actions of the Comprehensive Plan are principally intended to guide the decisions of District government. Continuous and ongoing consultation with Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, residents, community organizations, businesses, institutions, and property owners is essential as these policies and actions are carried out. 108.5

## How Does This Plan Affect Me? 109

The Comprehensive Plan is relevant to most people's daily lives and interests since it directs how and where change and development will occur. As the Comprehensive Plan is successfully implemented, it will have many far-reaching effects on everyone who lives or works in the District. It will affect where development occurs; where green space, recreation facilities and parks are improved; and how neighborhoods are conserved and enhanced as desirable places to live. The Comprehensive Plan affects everyone, not just public employees, developers and property owners. 109.1



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